

01-10-07a Ecclesiastes

Let's continue our worship this morning by turning for our scripture reading to Psalm 118. Psalm 118, this Psalm is subtitled in the New King James, the loving kindness of the Lord. The word translated loving kindness is Chesed, C-H-E-S-E-D.

And it is a difficult word to translate because it is very rich and full in its meaning. It's been translated loyal love. It has not only the connotations of love and loyalty and faithfulness, but also of benefit and of enduring goodwill and enduring faithfulness towards someone.

It's a very rich word and that's the subject and the topic of this Psalm. One of the characteristics of God's Chesed toward us is that it is unchanging. His mercies endure forever.

His loyal love toward us endures forever. And that's one of the points that is going to be coming to mind as we study our passage in Ecclesiastes this morning. The Psalm 118 begins this way.

Oh, give thanks to the Lord for He is good, for His mercy endures forever. Let Israel now say, His mercy endures forever. Let the house of Aaron now say, His mercy endures forever.

Let those who fear the Lord now say, His mercy endures forever. I called on the Lord in distress. The Lord answered me and set me in a broad place.

The Lord is on my side, I will not fear. What can man do to me? The Lord is for me among those who help me. Therefore, I shall see my desire on those who hate me.

It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes. All nations surrounded me, but in the name of the Lord, I will destroy them.

They surrounded me, yes, they surrounded me, but in the name of the Lord, I will destroy them. They surrounded me like bees. They were quenched like a fire of thorns.

For in the name of the Lord, I will destroy them. You pushed me violently that I might fall, but the Lord helped me. The Lord is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation.

The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tents of the righteous. The right hand of the Lord does valiantly. The right hand of the Lord is exalted.

The right hand of the Lord does valiantly. I shall not die but live and declare the works of the Lord. The Lord has chastened me severely, but He has not given me over to death.

Open to me the gates of righteousness. I will go through them, and I will praise the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord through which the righteous shall enter.

I will praise you for you have answered me and have become my salvation. The stone which the

builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing.

It is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.

Save now, I pray, O Lord. O Lord, I pray, send now prosperity. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

We have blessed you from the house of the Lord. God is the Lord, and He has given us light. Bind the sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar.

You are my God, and I will praise you. You are my God, I will exalt you. O, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endures forever." You probably recognize many of the verses of this psalm as having been quoted in the New Testament or having been the source of the lyrics to hymns.

You'll also recognize some of the subject material that we've been studying in Luke as far as entering by the narrow gate or the narrow door, the gates of righteousness. We were just talking a few moments ago about the third verse of the doxology that we sang this morning. O enter then His gates with praise and approach with joy His courts unto.

That sentiment is, of course, reflected here. You'll also notice in the beginning portion, it makes me smile every time I read the first part of Psalm 118 because in the churches I've been in in the past, we have a large congregation and the song leader will be up there leading the singing. You'll sing the first verse of the hymn and then he'll say, now just the ladies on the second verse and just the men on the third.

They'll pick different segments of the congregation and that's sort of what's going on in the beginning of this psalm because he says, okay, now let Israel, everybody sing, His mercy endures forever. Now let's just have the priests. Let the house of Aaron now say, His mercy endures forever.

Now let those who fear the Lord, of course, everybody wants to pipe up on that one. They don't want to be thought of as not God fearing. But this is a celebration of God's faithfulness during times of trial and that He is worthy to be trusted.

It is better to put confidence in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It's an easy thing to say. It's a much more difficult thing to do.

Many people have watched their investments in the stock market and the money markets and things take severe baiting over the last, not just the last month, but actually the last year. And we don't always stop to think that that's what confidence in man refers to. It's not just trusting people, but it's trusting the system that people have built.

It's trusting the financial markets. It's trusting the banks. It's trusting, you know, if that's where

your sense of security comes from, of course, I'm speaking hypothetically, not having any significant investments, but my own self.

But we all tend to get a sense of security from different things that are a part of the human system, whether it's we think, well, nothing bad will happen to me because I have a secure job or because I have financial security or there are these things in the human realm that I can fall back on. Well, that's putting confidence in man or putting confidence in the flesh. It's the things of this life.

And that has been the subject of Kohelet's book. The things that Solomon wrote to us address what you build in this life. And we build things because we want to make ourselves secure.

We want to satisfy ambitions and desires and needs. And if you ever study psychology and go to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and you get down to the basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter and the need for, of course, the psychologists always have to include, you know, having your eye on the opposite gender and fulfillment in that area. And then you move on up and above the basic needs and basic instincts for survival, you have the need for approval, the need for association, the need for love, to love and be loved.

The old song from the 30s or 40s along in there called Nature Boy. I always hear on the big band station, Nat King Cole sings that song. I always thought it had a strange title.

I like it better in the instrumental form. But the words of that, you know, he meets this strange, enchanted boy that flits around and you spend the whole song trying to figure out what's the point and at the end he says, well, the greatest thing you'll ever learn is to love and be loved in return. And so, you know, you spend the whole song whining around to find out that, you know, the big deep thought here is that fulfillment in life is tied up with loving and being loved in return.

And this is a human instinct and a human need and a lot of people find their fulfillment in that area. The sad thing is this view has crept into the church and masquerades as spirituality when it's not. I was, I didn't know whether to be amused or dismayed when Dan showed me the postcard he got in the mail from a local church that had a picture on the front of all these smiling faces and it says, you know, come and have coffee and eat, drink and be merry with us.

We're a friendly crew and it's just sort of like, you know, come join the cast of friends here. We're going to all have a ripping good time. Well, let's smile and sip some gourmet coffee.

And you have to look hard to even tell that it's from a church and then you have to look really hard to figure out what church it is from because they just put their name in an abbreviation. And the church, many segments of the church or many local churches have gotten to the point where what they are offering, their reason for existence and what they provide is love. You go to a place where you can love and be loved in return.

And this is making flesh your strength. You know, I want to go to a place where everybody knows my name, cheers. And we've got, you know, churches are like the spiritual cheers there where you go and you're recognized and you're accepted and you're comforted and you're put up with and you can ramble on about your problems and people will listen because they have to because, you know, you're supposed to.

And there's a lot of reliance upon human fellowship. Human fellowship is a wonderful thing. And it's a great thing to bear one another's burdens when it is done in the right context and with the right spirit, the Holy Spirit, providing some genuine encouragement, genuine love, the love of God, not the love of man.

It's not based on having, you know, pretty good coffee and people that are sort of obeying rules of behavior. But this is placing confidence in man. And churches today are attracting, this is the flypaper they put out, to swell their ranks and swell their financial resources and justify their existence.

And it's a very seductive and deceptive, insidious substitute for genuine worship of God, genuine fellowship with God, general growth and enhancing our understanding of the Lord. So David addresses that here. He says, he doesn't say, I called on the congregation in my distress, does he? Again, nothing wrong with doing this, but what is the source? The congregation should be an extension of the Lord himself, not just in word, but in fact.

Verse five, I called on the Lord in my distress. The Lord answered me and set me in a broad place. The Lord is on my side.

I will not fear. Unconsciously in many cases, and still making all the right noises and saying all the right things, a lot of us as believers today, and when I say us, I'm talking about the church in general, not us here specifically. We, of course, are well beyond and above all this.

We like to think anyway, but Christians have a tendency to say, well, the church belongs to God, so I'll go to the church. The church will solve my problems. And we could just as easily sing, the church is on my side, I will not fear.

What can man do to me? The church is for me among those who help me. And you can just substitute the church all the way through. It is better to trust in the church than to put confidence in the government.

It's better to trust in the church than to put confidence in man. And the church has substituted itself for God. And it's a subtle thing, but the Protestants like to throw rocks at the Catholics and say, well, look, the Catholics have elevated the church up to the level of God.

We've got the vicar of Christ, and the church can speak with the same authority as scripture and that sort of thing. And yet the Protestant church has done largely the same thing. What's the first

thing that you find out about big churches? And again, I'm exempting us.

Because we're not a big church, we don't have a best foot to put forward in this regard. But what do you generally hear about a church? If somebody says, oh, I go to this and so church, what do you find out? You find about, oh, well, these are the classes, these are the ministries, these are the benefits that you get by coming to this church. It's like getting a job.

You get a job. One of the things I like about my job is it has a great benefits package. You get insurance, you get days off, you get one thing and another.

Well, large churches, this is what they put forward. Well, here's what we can offer you. We've got a young, unmarried, divorced, singles with children with blue collar jobs class.

Or we've got 15 different classes, we've got 15 different ministries. And the Protestant church today in general has done the same thing as the Catholic church in interposing itself between the believer and God and making itself the source of blessing, making itself the source of nourishment and of fellowship and of all of the things that we are supposed to get directly from God. The great thing about this age is that every believer is a priest.

Every believer has a direct and open access to the throne of God through Christ. Jesus said, I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life. You come to the Father through me.

So the idea here of putting confidence in man, we tend to say, oh, well, these are the pagans who are going down to Egypt for their strength and that kind of thing. Not at all. We run the risk of substituting people for the Lord when the Lord is our rock.

He is our salvation. He is our deliverance. And once we understand that, it is easy then to appreciate and receive great blessing through the ministry of spiritual gifts God distributes among believers.

But we cannot afford to lose the perspective that everything that comes to us through fellowship and through spiritual gifts that God has distributed is really from God. And appreciating the giver rather than the gift, appreciating the giver rather even than the means by which he gives it. He channels many things through believers.

It's a wonderful thing. We take nothing away from that. It's a wonderful thing to be a part of a fellowship where I receive great benefit from association with our group and prayer and encouragement and support.

And all of us at one time or another, I think have been blessed by every other member of our group, both the immediate group here and our extended fellowship. And it's a wonderful thing. And I'm not talking about that, but you can lose sight.

In the same way that Israel began to function under the law and missed the point, believers today

can function in a local church and miss the point. You become occupied with the church and the people in it rather than the God for whom you're supposed to be assembling to worship. And this is one facet of the great sickness that Solomon is talking about in Ecclesiastes chapter six, where we become occupied with things in this world rather than the greater and grander view that includes God and his plan and the eternal future toward which we are all moving.

And if we become too much caught up in this life, one of the ways that we are deceived, you know, Jeremiah 17, nine, the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately corrupt, desperately wicked. Who can understand it? Well, one of the things we have to watch for is to not become occupied with the means of God's blessing or the means of God's provision rather than its source. And to become occupied with the result in time rather than the eternal glory of God that is reflected.

It's a wonderful thing to have our needs met. It's a wonderful thing to enjoy blessings in this life, but they're not an end in themselves. In case you're wondering why I'm harping on this, you know, people always tend to think, well, I wonder why he's dwelling on this.

Did something come up here recently? It's not. I've been spending the last week valiantly going through and smoothing out the translation of Ecclesiastes from chapter one up to chapter seven where we find ourselves this morning. And as I go back through, this is the thing that has really struck me.

And going back through and translating, I went, I didn't even use the translation that we've accomplished up to this point. I just went back to the beginning and went to every Hebrew word, looked it up in the lexicon, made a fresh translation all the way through. And the thing that has just impressed me so much about what Solomon has said in the first six chapters of that book is how easy it is and what a universal syndrome it is for us to get caught up in this world and to not look beyond it, to function entirely under the heavens, under the sun, and not think beyond the moment, not think beyond the immediate, not think beyond the tangible and the mundane and the earthly.

And every paragraph of his message to us cries out to lift up our eyes to the hills, to lift up our eyes to the heavens, to lift up our eyes to God and look beyond the immediate and look beyond the moment. It is a struggle. We saw Jesus telling His audience in Luke, strive, agonizomai, to enter by the narrow gate.

It has a similar passage over in Matthew 7, as we do in Luke, where it takes effort. You have to struggle. You have to consciously expend effort to not slip into this.

Our default is to be caught up in the affairs of this life. So this psalm is great because the psalmist here points out the fact that even in distress, surrounded by the nations, in the name of the Lord, I will destroy them. I'm not just going to destroy them because they're surrounding me and they're threatening me.

I'm not going to destroy them and I will be delivered. My deliverance is not what's in view here. It is the name of the Lord that is in view.

They will be destroyed because of the name of the Lord. Verse 12, they surrounded me like bees. They're quenched like a fire of thorns.

What is different about a fire of thorns versus a fire of wood or hay or stubble or some other thing that might feed a fire? We're going to see the fire of thorns this morning in Ecclesiastes. So this caught my eye especially. If you've ever set fire to thorns, they crackle.

I don't know what it is about thorns, but when you put them in the fire, there is little miniature explosions. You've seen where sparks and embers fly out, this snap, crackle, and pop effect. And it's a very active kind of fire.

It's not like the quiet fire you have in your fireplace where you've got the gentle flame and you sit there staring into it and feeling all romantic. A crackling fire of thorns is like firecrackers. They're popping and snapping and sparks are going this way and that.

And the other thing is everybody's happy looking at a fire of thorns because the thorns injure. The thorns do damage to your skin. Nobody likes, I don't know anybody that likes thorns.

I don't know anybody that likes wading into a big sea of metals and coming out on the other side. Even if you've got heavy clothing on, the things embed themselves and later on, you run your hand across your shirt or your jeans or something and you get stuck later on. The little thorns have detached themselves or they'll work their way in.

Part of the curse that came to us at the fall was the thorns and briars. So a fire that quenches the thorns is a good thing but it's a very dramatic thing. It says, they surrounded me like bees.

They were quenched like a fire of thorns. Their destruction is dramatic. You pushed me violently that I might fall but the Lord helped me.

The Lord is my strength and song and he has become my deliverance. Now, once again, people see salvation, they immediately think, well, I'm not going to the lake of fire. Happy am I? But this deliverance in the context, what is it deliverance from? It's deliverance from enemies.

It's deliverance from distress. It's deliverance from what seemed like certain calamity. And believers who grow in grace, who grow in knowledge, who grow in the exercise of faith, the Lord is going to become our daily deliverance.

He's going to become our deliverance in situations and circumstances and relationships with people. The voice of rejoicing and deliverance or salvation is in the tents of the righteous. Not just the tents of the believers, not just the tents of the saved from eternal damnation but the tents of

the righteous.

The right hand of the Lord does valiantly. The right hand of the Lord is exalted. What is the right hand of the Lord, by the way? I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of what? My righteousness.

How did the righteous become righteous? Well, they have these tents. They partake of the righteousness of God. The right hand of the Lord is the Lord's righteousness.

His own righteousness becomes the source of righteousness for those who are being delivered. I shall not die but live and declare the works of the Lord. This echoes something that Jesus said in the New Testament.

The one that believes in me shall never die. This, of course, doesn't mean that we avoid physical death. What it means is that physical death becomes so inconsequential that you don't even worry about it.

And the psalmist here says, I shall not die but live. And what he's talking about is, I'm not going to perish never to be seen again. I will not die.

Physical death is so inconsequential that from this perspective, I'm here for the long term. I'm here forever. And my purpose is going to be to declare the works of the Lord.

Even though the Lord has chastened me severely, he has not given me over to death. I still have an eternal future. I still have confidence in the covenant promises of God which will be fulfilled long after my physical death has taken place.

Open to me the gates of righteousness, verse 19. I will go through them and I will praise the Lord. This is an expression of determination.

This is an expression of priority and of goal. I know where the gates of righteousness are and I have vowed to enter through. This is the gate of the Lord through which the righteous shall enter.

What is the criteria? How do you go through the gates? By attaining righteousness. Where does righteousness come from? By faith. I will praise you for you have answered me and have become my salvation.

You have the great passage there about the stone that the builders rejected. Verse 26, Jesus said, you will not see me again until you say, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. And so often that reference to a single Old Testament verse is a bookmark for the entire passage, for the entire psalm.

And you look at the content of this psalm. What was Jesus telling his generation when he said, you will not see me again until you say, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Who is

it that's going to see the Lord again? Who is it that's going to have fellowship with him? Those who know how to enter the gates.

Those who understand the righteousness of God and how to partake of it by faith. Those who claim the Lord as their confidence and as their deliverance. You are my God in verse 28.

I will praise you. You are my God. I will exalt you.

This is the other characteristic of believers who have a genuine and growing relationship with God. Where is the praise? Where is the exaltation? It's a sad thing. I see this happen maybe even more often than some of you all in getting around believers and hearing believers talk to one another, especially believers that are scattered around the Metroplex.

They get together and talk about, well, I go to this church or I go to that church. And all of the conversation is about the church and what the church has done and what happened in the church. It is a rare thing to hear people get together and talk about God and what God has done.

When's the last time you can think of outside of our fellowship where you've been around a gathering of believers in any context where people were celebrating God, the faithfulness of God, the things that they had learned about God from the scripture about his faithfulness and about the unique expressions of grace and mercy that are reflected in his word and in our lives. It just doesn't happen much. People spend all their time talking about, oh, well, down at our church and our music director and this happened and that happened and our Sunday school class did this, that and the other.

And, oh, we had such a good time at this pep rally and at that trip and we've done this, that and the other. And all of these things are fine. There's nothing intrinsically wrong with them unless they become a substitute for relationship with God.

And so many believers have been lulled into a false confidence. Is it any wonder that when the door closes to the kingdom, there are gonna be so many standing outside saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. We ate and drank in your presence and you taught in our streets.

In your name, we did so many wonderful things and Jesus is going to open the little peep hole in the door there and say, I do not know you where you are from. Depart from me, you workers of unrighteousness. You workers of things that are not righteousness.

We tend to think, I think the King James translates at workers of iniquity. It's not that people ran around doing all kinds of sinful things. It is the word righteousness with the negative prefix in front of it.

Adikia, adikaiois or adikaioisune is righteousness. Adikia is minus righteousness. You workers of what is not righteousness.

You've done everything in the world but gained the righteousness of God by faith. You've done all of these works. You've clothed the naked.

You've fed the hungry. You've visited the sick and afflicted. You've had ministries.

You've had efforts. You've done all of these things but it didn't attain unto righteousness because it wasn't accomplished by faith. It was accomplished for some other reason.

You weren't motivated by the hope of reflecting God's glory in the eternal future. You had some other motivation. It was just joy de vive and hail fellow well-met down at the church and let's all get together and paint the widow's house or let's all get together and re-roof the building or let's all get together and do this, that and the other.

And there's a sense of fellowship and camaraderie and esprit de corps and all those other French phrases that people think of when they're all together and having a good time. And well, I'm part of this great church with all of its righteousness. It's going to rub off on me.

And it doesn't end up being an expression of individual faith in God. This is the key to life. This is the reason we're here is our individual minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day, trust and confidence and application of what we know from God's word, His promises, the principles, the doctrines, the perspective that we gain by knowing who we are and why we're here and taking daily steps in the light down the road that leads through the narrow gate to life, life in the sense of fruitfulness, life in the sense of claiming and attaining to the righteousness of God by faith, motivated by hope, expressed in love.

Many of these things will follow. It is easy to see two Israelites coming down to the temple and offering a sacrifice. In one, God is pleased.

And in the other, he finds it an abomination because one is doing it out of faith. The other is doing it for some superficial reason. Cain and Abel both brought sacrifices to God.

One was a reflection of Cain's own efforts in growing all of the vegetables that made his salad. The other was an expression of faith in the future sacrifice that would attain, would make possible our salvation. God looked down and was pleased with Abel's sacrifice.

He wasn't pleased with Cain's sacrifice. Both of them believed in God. If Cain was not a believer, why did he bother to sacrifice at all? Why did he even come down? If he didn't care about God and the things of God, why waste good vegetation? He could dry it or make a mess of pottage out of it or something.

Why does he bring it down and offer it unless he's a believer? This is function as to bringing the sacrifices. So once again, we want to keep our eyes on, as it says in verse 23, this is the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes. Now we want to remember what comes first and what

comes after.

Believers and churches are wonderful things. They are God ordained, just like the law and the sacrifices were wonderful things and God ordained them. But if they take the place of God, you have violated, you remember the Ten Commandments? Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

Well, people unconsciously put things in the place of God. When you look to something and you place your faith in it, you rely on it, you put your confidence in it, whatever it may be. The arm of flesh will fail you.

We sang that this morning, stand up, stand up for Jesus. And one of those verses talks about the arm of flesh will fail you and that's what it says here. Well, I could wax even more eloquent than I have on Psalm 118, but I do want to get over to Ecclesiastes this morning.

If you'll return to that passage, we are at the ending portion of chapter six and the beginning portion of chapter seven. The last part in the New King James, Ecclesiastes chapter six, verse seven and following, all the labor of man is for his mouth, his appetite. And yet the soul is not filled for what more has the wise than the fool? What does the poor man have who knows how to walk before the living? Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire.

This also is vanity and grasping for the wind. And we've, I think, improved the translation a little bit to help our understanding and seeing that whether you succeed in your labors of satisfying your earthly needs and you become rich, or if you're poor and you find ways to have your needs met by parading yourself, you walk in front of the living, all living, and receive the benefits of charity and of ministry and whatever that may be. Either way, the wise is not gonna have any more than the fool.

The idea that the grabbing hold of things that you can see rather than filling your soul is vapor and feeding on wind. Whatever one is, it has been named already for it is known that he is man and he cannot contend with him who is mightier than he, since there are many things that increase havel, vapor, many words. It says many things here, but once again, this is Davarim.

There are many words that just add to the vapor. This is like a lot of people talking on a cold day. It's just a lot of vapor in the air.

How is man the better? Who knows what is good for man in life? All the days of his vain life, which he passes like a shadow. Who can tell a man what will happen after him under the sun? And we saw that there is an answer to this question. If we shift our perspective beyond the immediate, beyond the earthly, and keep God in mind as we make our value judgments, as we set our priorities, as we decide what we are going to rely on and what we are going to work on, day by day by day, there is an answer to this question.

But it's a question that needs to be asked. And Solomon asks it in more than one place in this book. Who can tell a man what will happen to him or after, afterward, after the sun sets, what is going to be the result? What's going to be the outcome of life? Well, I think from looking at Psalm 118 and the concepts that we reviewed this morning, we know the answer to that question.

It becomes a matter of seeking to maintain that perspective. The thing that's difficult is it makes good sense when we look at the Word of God sitting here this morning. But on Wednesday morning or Thursday afternoon or some other time in the week when we're caught up in the affairs of this life, we're performing our duties in terms of employment or watching our kids or taking care of the house or driving here and there, checking off the things on our to-do list.

Do we keep this in mind? Well, this is the difference between redeeming the time and not redeeming the time. So how is it possible to seize and lay hold of proper perspective of life day by day by day? Well, how do you maintain a relationship with a human being? I have very, very close friends that I don't really know what they're up to now because I haven't communicated with them. I haven't heard from them.

They haven't heard from me. I am one of the world's worst when it comes to correspondence. I don't even, anymore since I changed my email address, I don't even get email from people.

And I'm cut off. And guys that I've been close to in the past, I have no idea what's up with them. And what's the problem? Lack of communication.

It is impossible to maintain a close relationship with someone with whom you do not communicate. And it has to be communication in both directions. The same is true with God.

The means of maintaining a divine perspective is divine fellowship. The means of maintaining a godly perspective, a godly life, is fellowship with God. There has been sort of a misunderstanding of fellowship with God that it is contingent entirely upon confession of sin.

The tradition that many of us come from is 1 John 1.9. I sin and I'm out of fellowship. I confess my sins and I'm back in fellowship. Confession of sin is exceedingly important.

To enable us to be cleansed, to enable us to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit when He speaks. But it is not the only element of fellowship. Fellowship is communication.

It is sitting down to table, to a meal with someone. We saw this in the parable or the metaphor that Jesus uses of the door that gets shut. The master of the house is gonna rise up and shut the door.

And these who wanna be in the kingdom are gonna find themselves outside. Why is the master of the house seated? He's reclining at the banquet table with the ones that have already entered. He's spending time in fellowship and sharing a meal with the righteous, with the ones who paid

attention and knew how to enter that door and sought it in this life and didn't wait until the next.

Revelation 3.20, Jesus says, I stand at the door and knock. If any man will hear my voice and open the door, I will come into him and sup with him and he with me. Share a fellowship meal.

The Lord's table in the New Testament, you hear the words of Paul to the Corinthians talking about the abuse of the Lord's table. It was a meal. It wasn't just a dish with crackers.

It was a fellowship meal that he was addressing and calling the Lord's table. And it goes beyond the observance of communion. Their fellowship had become corrupted.

Well, how do we fellowship with God? We share not only conversation. We not only share communication, but there is something that we partake of together and it's the truth of God. It's the word of God.

It is sharing that viewpoint. So that is something that we have to keep in the forefront of our mind each and every day. I think the example I've mentioned before of David and of Daniel.

David said, evening and morning and at noon will I pray and cry aloud and he shall hear my voice. Psalm 55, 17. Daniel, how did he get in trouble with the wise men? How did they snare him? Because Daniel prayed three times a day.

He made it a point at the beginning of the day, in the middle of the day, and at the end of the day to stop all the presses, stop the wheels, stop the motion, stop the world and get off. Get off of the world, get out of the world and refocus on God and the things of God. And it's one thing to hear, used to be so frustrating, I would always hear, well, this is the great Christian life.

This is the productive Christian life. And the more they described it, the more frustrating it was because I didn't know how to get there from where I was. Well, this is how to get there.

If we wanna be in that place, if we wanna enjoy that closeness with God, this is how. We have to share the meal. We have to share the fellowship with God, not with a church, not with surrogates, not with substitutes, not fool ourselves with vocabulary, but genuinely partake of God's will, God's purpose.

What is God's goal in any situation that comes up? It's easy for us to arrive at a goal. I'm in pain, I want it to stop. I'm in distress, I want it to go away.

I'm in conflict, I want it resolved. I'm under pressure, I want it to leave. But when we begin to partake of God's point of view, we see that these are the means to an end.

How can I grow? How can I improve my perspective? How can I exercise my faith? How can I best pray for myself or others? What is God up to in this circumstance? Wouldn't it be terrible if in boot camp, every time somebody was asked to drop and roll or set up interlocking fields of fire or

field strip their weapon or all of the other skills that are learned, if they say, well, you've got to do this. They put them under pressure. You've got to run five miles in your combat gear.

People say, oh, this is stressful, this is painful. And so the drill instructor would say, oh, well, if it's going to put you in conflict, if it's going to make you feel bad, why, we don't have to do the five mile run with your helmet on. Here, take your stuff off, get down to your running shorts and some nice comfortable shoes and we'll just go half a mile.

That wouldn't accomplish the objective. But yet we often pray in that fashion. Pressure and difficulty comes up and we say, God, make it go away.

Resolve it quickly. Instead of let me learn what I need to learn. Let me grow in the areas I need to grow through this.

We don't want God to take away our five mile runs in combat gear. We don't want God to take away the pressure of the drill instructor putting us through what is necessary to prepare us for what's coming, but we have to keep our eye on the goal. We can only do that by cultivating fellowship with God, partaking of that meal, dwelling by the rivers of water like the tree of Psalm 1, meditating on the law of the Lord day and night.

That has to be our priority. It has to be our goal. And all of these things will follow.

And everything else will be in context. The blessings we receive through the church, through believers, through all of the means that God provides will be kept in context. And we won't confuse the gift and the giver or the means with the end.

But it is a common failing. It's one of the reasons so much of the church is on the broad road that goes through the wide gate that leads to the big bonfire of fruitless branches. And that's what we want to avoid.

Psalm 118 is a great place for meditation. Ecclesiastes is a great place for meditation on these truths. Let's pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we'll actually return to Ecclesiastes.